

ADDRESS, FIRE DEPARTMENT INSTRUCTORS'
CONFERENCE

MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE

March 24, 1964

I am pleased to have the opportunity to return to Memphis and again address the Fire Department Instructors Conference. For my second look at FDIC, I note another four-day conference packed with program items of tremendous significance. These are concerned with reducing the annual tragic loss of life and destruction of property by fire.

There is perhaps no need to point out that assembled in this auditorium is the cream of the crop, so to speak, of this nation's fire prevention, fire protection and fire suppression enthusiasts. I use the descriptive term "enthusiasts" advisedly. There is no more dedicated group of people anywhere than those of the fire service like yourselves. You are imbued with the humanitarian zeal to hold in check the serious economic drain on this Nation's resources caused by fire. The fact that you have assembled in this auditorium is evidence that the fire service of America is aware of its responsibility and that you desire an opportunity to gain professional knowledge.

Since the success of this program, now in its infancy, is going to be determined by how much new knowledge you take home with you on Friday, it might be worthwhile to look at the fire statistics for the past year. According to the National Fire Protection Association, fires in 1963 cost 11,800 lives and destroyed \$1,760,000,000 in tangibles, the highest in our nation's history. Reducing the economic drain on this nation's resources is the reason this conference is of such significance. It is why you must go away from here on Friday with added knowledge and inspiration to cope with the proportionate share of the fire loss that occurred in your city and in your State. Most of the lives lost were in residential fires, principally women and children. The largest loss of life in a single incident in 1963, according to NFPA, occurred in my State, a fact of which I am not proud. This was the commercial airplane that crashed at Elkton in December, which claimed 82 lives.

It is fruitless to "view with alarm" without offering suggestions for improvement. Here we come to a delicate situation because one can only talk about that which one knows, and I know only what we have done in my State of Maryland in an effort to keep fire losses to a minimum. Please accept my statements about what Maryland has done as facts of history, rather than boastfulness. . . .